



**Council** for the  
humanities, arts  
& social sciences

17th August 2010

**Research Workforce Strategy**  
**Research Funding and Policy Branch**  
**Research Division**  
**Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research**  
**GPO Box 9839**  
**Canberra ACT 2601**

## **Re: Submission by the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in response to the discussion paper Meeting Australia's Research Workforce Needs**

The Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (the Council) supports more than 85 member organisations in their relationships with policy makers and the broader community. Council members engage in research and professional practice in disciplines across the humanities, creative arts and social sciences (HASS) and are also active in transdisciplinary research and practice.

The development of a high quality research workforce is crucial to the health of the HASS disciplines and their ability to contribute to Australia's innovation system, its social cohesion and national identity. The Council supports development of the strategy, and believes it is an integral part of a broader vision to increase educational attainment, social inclusion and productivity growth.

The sector is diverse, and as the work undertaken so far by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research has demonstrated, the career pathways, training and use of research outputs vary widely. The strategy should reflect this diverse set of researcher environments. This submission argues that the Table 1 strategy should be supported by programs aimed at specific sectors and problems, starting with the immediate challenge of developing academic teachers and researchers who will educate the professionals needed over the next decade.

This submission points out general issues and also identifies where the research workforce strategy will have to consider discipline based programs to build the supply of well qualified researchers to meet demand in both academia and the private and public sectors. The Council has worked with member organisations in identifying key points and urges the Australia Government to further develop its implementation plan for the strategy with organisations who can offer detailed knowledge of the research workforce in particular disciplines. The Council notes particularly the submissions by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, Australian Council of Deans of Education, the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts Social Sciences and the Humanities, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations and the NTEU. Other membership organisations, through their own structures, are also addressing this issue and making submissions. As the Academy's submission notes, the strategy will necessitate substantial changes in the way universities and research funders operate over the next decade.

**Q1: Do the issues identified adequately capture the challenges facing Australia in adapting to the changing nature of employer demand and meeting its innovation aspirations over the next decade? If not, what other challenges should be considered?**

- The Council agrees that the factors identified at paragraphs 2.54 and 2.55 drive adoption of a Research Workforce Strategy and note that these changes will force a focus on the short term supply shortages. It also notes that, at paragraph 3.222, the discussion paper correctly identifies the short-term strategies needed for workforce renewal and expansions.

- The paper should acknowledge the long lead times to develop researchers for the workforce, which set limits to increasing supply of Australian trained researchers over the next four years.
- The paper needs to more clearly identify the short, medium and long-term nature of the challenges and opportunities facing Australia's research workforce. For example, the ageing of the academic workforce presents short, medium and long-term challenges, such as the recruitment of qualified staff in areas of current shortages and increasing undergraduate student numbers as the Bradley Reforms take full effect, but the matter is urgent and so needs a short term strategy while we wait for the medium and long term strategies to expand the research workforce overall to take effect. Outlining the challenges and opportunities in these terms will allow for a more comprehensive and targeted strategy to be articulated.
- The strategy needs to deal further with the issues of tracking labor demand in professions, industry and the academic workforce and to decide how research in this area will be used in both short-term and long-term workforce planning and research training decision making. Initial studies have shown that there are current and imminent shortages in areas such as Education, Law and Business, but as the Universities Australia/Professions Australia [paper](#) shows, the extent of planning and forecasting varies widely across professional areas, including within HASS based professions. The Council notes that the paper identifies the issues at 3.225 and it supports the integration of data collection and reporting with the wider framework of workforce planning underway within Skills Australia.
- In defining the challenges the strategy should identify particular areas of short term supply problems. For instance, the Australian Council of Deans of Education has documented the problems of supplying early childhood development specialists unless they can also build the supply of high quality researchers/academics who can build and deliver the research-based content needed to educate the specialists. The analysis at page 14 gives a projection over the decade, and milestones along the route, however policy makers need some clear priorities in areas of particular shortage.
- The paper at paragraph 3.225 makes a welcome commitment to improve the rigor and frequency of data collection and reporting on characteristics of the research workforce. The Council recommends that the Strategy recognizes the expertise and experience in the Australian research community on evaluation and data collection of higher education. Tracking and evaluating the education experience is a well documented challenge, which Australian higher education research centres and geography and demographic researchers with expertise in this area should advise on. The Research Workforce Strategy should include a recommendation to establish a high level advisory group to work with the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, The Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to plan a consistent and deep series of data reports which will allow adequate tracking and evaluation of the strategy itself, and the overall market for researchers.
- The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia would be an integral part of this group, and in its submission the Academy further develops the role into a group which can develop a research base and tracking methodology for a research workforce strategy. The Academy offers the expertise of its Fellows in research in labour force analysis, planning and development to assist in this process.
- The strategy needs to outline a pathway for policy coordination and cooperation between DEEWR and DIISR relating to research workforce needs in the Education and Training sector, especially in meeting the higher education attainment targets set in response to the Bradley Review.

**Q2: Do the issues identified adequately capture the opportunities available to Australia to better respond to the changing nature of employer demand in Australia and meet national innovation aspirations? If not, what other opportunities should be considered?**

- The barriers to overseas recruitment are a significant problem in dealing with imminent shortages of researchers and the Council welcomes the discussion paper's acknowledgement of this. As Hugo has

noted in [CHASS Occasional Paper 6](#), recruitment from abroad is an important avenue for addressing the shortfall expected due to the ageing of Australia's academic workforce.

- The paper should acknowledge that the short-term outlook of former higher education policy has contributed to a lack of long-term focused succession strategies and talent management in past decades. Alongside rapid growth in the higher education sector this has impacted on Australia's current ability to respond to greater demand for research based innovation and policy making. The corresponding squeeze on funding for higher education meant that organisations shrank or remained static rather than growing steadily, or replacing steadily, and incomes in academic/research positions shrank relative to the other professions. The paper calls for some major change in talent management and Australia needs to be clear on what it is moving from, as well as future directions. This would also allow better understanding of where shortages lie for middle and late career researchers.
- The Council has previously called for new funding for the Australian Research Council as a way of improving success rates for research grants. Giving able and engaged researchers the resources to pursue their research is essential part of any talent management strategy. The Council notes that Universities Australia has made improved success rates for research grants a focus of its submission on the Research Workforce Strategy and that the Academy of Social Sciences has also called attention to this brake on developing research quantity and quality.

**Q3: Do the issues identified adequately capture the challenges facing Australia in delivering the required levels of research skills to its workforce over the next decade? If not, what other challenges should be considered?**

- More focus on incentives to pursue a research career need to be developed within the Research Workforce Strategy. In order to fill the academic positions necessary to educate the next generation of teachers and educational leaders in disciplines like Education, such incentives need to focus on encouraging both younger researchers at the beginning of their teaching careers, and experienced teachers to pursue research training. The strategy should deal with the problem of research careers where experience of professional practice is also important in the quality of the research workforce.
- The Council welcomes the paper's consideration of a review of the research training system in Australia. Member organisations and the strategy team have suggested a range of possible models, which need to be discussed with discipline associations as well as universities and research institutions.

**Q4: Do the issues identified adequately capture the opportunities available to Australia to enhance its supply of research skills over the next decade? If not, what other opportunities should be considered?**

- The paper should quickly reform the Research Training Scheme to begin to address the projected shortfalls in the research workforce. A wide-ranging review of the Research Training Scheme has already been concluded<sup>1</sup>, and its conclusions could be utilised by the Research Workforce Strategy as a policy blueprint while deciding how many new RTS places to support; the discipline areas they will be created in; and the funding level at which to resource them.
- The paper acknowledges the shortcomings of the funding formula for the Research Training Scheme at 4.329, and correctly links this to the ability to deliver change in research training and to enhance quality of the training provided. The Council recommends that the strategy include a review of the real cost of providing supervision and resources for research training, to be carried out by higher education researchers in conjunction with the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science & Research. The current high-cost/low-cost funding formula fails to adequately resource those disciplines, especially in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, that fall within the low-cost

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<sup>1</sup> *Building Australia's Research Capacity: A Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation (December 2008)*

differential, yet are expensive due to high supervision, fieldwork, infrastructure and resource costs, and further discourages the kind of inter-disciplinary research required to solve complex modern programs. Clarity in data sought is essential if the research trainers and the Government are to gain a clear picture across the disciplines areas and institutional settings.

- The Council supports specific proposals to improve the flexibility of HDR candidature as an important measure to entice people firmly established in careers to also pursue research training. For example, allowing part time Australian Postgraduate Awards would particularly benefit those within professions such as Law and Education to continue in their profession part time with additional income support to make up for their time spent out of the workforce, and eventually increase the pool of academics in these high-demand areas. The strategy should consider specific programs to cover short-term gaps with funding for universities in mentoring and helping HDR graduates into entry level positions and early career researchers move to mid-career positions.

**Q5: Do the issues identified adequately capture the challenges facing Australia in providing productive and viable career paths to its researchers over the next decade and promoting them adequately? If not, what other challenges should be considered?**

- The casualisation of the academic workforce needs more immediate attention in the Research Workforce Strategy. This is a pressing issue for the academic workforce in the humanities, arts and social sciences, which rely heavily on sessional staff to teach courses in these disciplines, and contributes to stalled career pathways for early career researchers as they wait for a permanent position to become available. Casual teaching can also prolong or disrupt research training, leading to higher attrition rates amongst HDR candidates and impacting on the supply of HDR qualified individuals entering the workplace.

**Q6: Do the issues identified adequately capture the opportunities available to Australia to better support researchers at different stages of their careers over the next decade? If not, what other opportunities should be considered?**

- Currently Government funding to support career pathways of researchers is limited to fellowships administered by the Australia Research Council and NHMRC which are highly competitive and have little broad impact. These together with university postdoctoral fellowship schemes provide 3- 5 years of salary at a time in many people's lives when they are seeking security to buy homes, start families etc. This results in many exiting the research workforce at the end of their fellowship. The Strategy needs to develop a wide-ranging approach comprising of a comprehensive strategy covering all stages of a research career, from pathways into research training through to support for mid-level career researchers, opportunities for HDR graduates to return to the research workforce from the public and private sectors, and incentives to encourage more movement between industry, and the private and public workforces and universities.
- Incentives to encourage institutions and organizations to define and implement career pathways in the research/academic workforce for HDR graduates beginning during research training would be one way of encouraging young researchers to embark on a research career and to entice experienced professionals into the research workforce. Given the stagnation in numbers of domestic students commencing HDR programs (4.215), this is an urgent issue to address in order to boost supply in the long-term. Specific programs, such as top-up scholarships for areas of high demand (4.228) are a good start. Other programs to support female researchers to resume careers after breaks from the workforce should be included in the strategy.
- The Allens Consulting Group paper showed some university employers and private employers were actively reviewing and updating their own people management strategies and the RWS should support this development across both academic and private and public employers. The talent management and succession strategies will essentially rest with employers, however a Government commitment to supporting this work would be welcome, and particularly in meeting short term needs.

- With the Australian Government’s commitment to building links between the Australian Public Service and research Institutions, in response to the *Ahead of the Game* report, the strategy should include action for the APS based on recruitment of research specialists who would act as knowledge brokers and knowledge translators between policy makers and researchers. With the development of better understanding and utilization of research within the public sector, the potential promise of evidence based policy making would come closer AND the prospects of career development would improve for researchers in both HASS and STEM areas.

**Q7: Are the priority areas for action outlined in Table 1 the right ones? What other priorities should be identified?**

- The Council supports the priority areas identified in the Table as the basis for action. These goals are highly achievable and the proposed actions go a long way to ensure the successful implementation of the strategy. The table, however, does require some refinement to ensure that the challenges and opportunities faced by different discipline areas are recognised and incorporated into the table of actions.

**Q8: Does the allocation of responsibilities for priority areas and actions outlined in Table 1 adequately capture the roles of all parties? Are there any issues relating to the allocation of responsibilities that need to be considered?**

- The strategy at this stage has not developed the incentives and tracking mechanisms to encourage universities and other research training providers to implement long-term human resource development strategies. The Government and Universities should agree on the urgency of talent management and succession strategies and whether there should be national tracking of their impact within the strategy’s evaluation processes.
- The Table should over all give more detail on talent management and succession strategies.
- The paper needs to recognise the role of individual discipline areas in identifying and addressing the supply and demand of research staff, and in developing productive and viable career pathways for researchers. Mentoring programs, talent development and succession strategies, for example, could be effectively operated at a disciplinary level.
- The Table should address provision of resources for meeting the immediate/imminent/urgent problem areas.
- The Council supports the list of short term actions for government and the adoption of the four priority areas.

**Q9: Are the timeframes outlined in Table 1 appropriate? Are there any priority areas that require more immediate or longer-term action?**

- Evaluation to be built into the design of the strategy, to ensure adequate tracking through the rollout of the strategy and to allow for incremental improvements. This process could be directed by the data advisory group suggested in the Council’s answer to question one.
- The Table’s ‘Proposed priority areas for action’ presents no strategies or actions to address the issue of the casualisation of the academic workforce as succession and talent management strategies develop. A lack of continuity and stability in casual employment, and a lack of obvious pathways to contract and tenured employment emerged as important issues for early career researchers in information gathering during preparation of the RWS discussion paper. The NTEU and CAPA have also identified that the uncertainty of employment status is a problem in retaining researchers, particularly in many HASS areas with high undergraduate demand casual teaching.

For further information please contact

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